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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001896

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2018  
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SUBJECT: C.A.R.: FRENCH SHARE U.S. WORRIES ON C.A.R.'S  
PLIGHT

REF: PARIS 1698

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Andrew Young, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: French officials at the Presidency, MOD, and MFA shared U.S. concerns about the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) during Ambassador Frederick Cook's October 14 and 15 consultations in Paris. These concerns centered on the almost complete lack of good governance in C.A.R., President Bozize's failure to lead, endemic corruption, Bozize's suspect associates, and business practices focused only on short-term profit that tended to alienate potential investors and that did not feature long-term thinking. Despite these problems, the French shared the U.S. view that engagement remained necessary, if only to avoid humanitarian crises and the creation of a political and social vacuum in a part of Africa that could ill afford more instability. The French said they wanted the EUFOR/MINURCAT UN follow-on force to be deployed in C.A.R. as well as in Chad, and would work to achieve that. At the same time, the French indicated that they wanted to reduce their bilateral military presence in C.A.R., which might finally cause Bozize to realize that France's security posture with C.A.R. would change under the new Africa policies Sarkozy wants to implement. The French expressed support for Ambassador Cook's idea of working with MICOPAX as a way to provide sorely needed training to FACA. They also expressed interest in limiting the influence of Bozize business associate Saifée Durbar, including ways of enforcing a criminal judgment against him. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) U.S. Ambassador to C.A.R. Frederick Cook met, separately, with Remi Marechaux (AF advisor at the French Presidency), Colonel Denis Opplert and desk officer Elodie Riche (MOD Strategic Affairs Delegation, Department for Regional Questions, Africa Bureau), and MFA DAS-equivalent Christine Fages, during his October 14-15 consultations in Paris. Acting AF-watcher attended the three meetings; INR/AA Bernadette Graves attended the meeting with Marechaux.

#### Lack of Leadership

¶3. (C) At all of the meetings, Ambassador Cook provided his on-the-ground assessment of C.A.R.'s situation, which was not promising. The French tended to agree with his evaluation, both generally and with respect to details. Ambassador Cook focused on C.A.R.'s plight as a dysfunctional entity hardly warranting the label of "state." Many, if not most, of its problems flowed from the top, with President Bozize not willing or incapable of providing leadership, at times apparently unaware of what it meant to be "head of state." The French agreed with this assessment of Bozize, noting that President Sarkozy had little patience with his counterpart, as demonstrated by the now-famous 20-minute, no-frills

meeting Sarkozy accorded Bozize in December 2007, during which he bluntly told Bozize what C.A.R. needed to do to warrant better treatment, hardly giving Bozize a chance to respond ("one of the strangest meetings I've ever attended and had to write up," Fages commented).

#### Priorities

14. (C) Ambassador Cook said that U.S. priorities were (1) to avoid humanitarian catastrophe in C.A.R. and (2) to avoid the development of a political and social vacuum in a country surrounded by numerous regional problems. To this end he noted his calls for political reconciliation, better governance, and more sensible business policies to attract investors. Ambassador Cook said that he took care to address both the government and opposition in the same manner on these issues so as not to appear favoring one or the other, which all sides seemed to appreciate. Fages added a third priority for France -- the withdrawal of French troops from C.A.R., currently numbering, according to Fages, about 400, including troops serving in EUFOR and deployed bilaterally.

#### Post-EUFOR/MINURCAT

15. (C) Although Fages noted the desire to withdraw or reduce French forces deployed in C.A.R., all of Ambassador Cook's interlocutors stressed the need for the planned UN operation that will succeed EUFOR and MINURCAT to deploy forces in C.A.R. Fages noted that the UK seemed opposed to the following-on force's deploying units in C.A.R. and she said that the U.S. and France would have to work with the UK

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to change its views. The French said that it would be a mistake not to place forces in C.A.R., especially in view of the stabilizing effect French forces and forces associated with EUFOR/MINURCAT have had in C.A.R. Rebels, bandits, and traffickers of all kinds would quickly exploit parts of C.A.R. suddenly denuded of international troops, which would undermine the international community's current strategy of deploying peacekeepers in Sudan, Chad, and C.A.R. in order to address the region's problems comprehensively.

#### C.A.R.-France Security Arrangements

16. (C) The desire to withdraw troops from C.A.R., the French said, was in keeping with the broader changes in France's military relationship with Africa that the GOF was implementing, particularly with the eight African countries (including C.A.R.) with which it maintains "defense agreements" (see reflet for details on France's evolving military policy in Africa). However, Bozize did not seem to be getting the message, Marechaux said, despite repeated French briefings. The previous defense agreement would be converted into a military cooperation agreement. C.A.R. would still benefit from the latter in terms of training and other support, but the new arrangement would not have the mutual defense provisions of the defense agreement. This Bozize seemed to refuse to acknowledge. "He thinks that as long as we have troops deployed in C.A.R., we'll rescue him in extremis," Fages said, "but he doesn't appreciate that that is going to end once the defense agreement becomes a military cooperation agreement." The French had hoped to renegotiate these agreements by the end of 2008, but Fages confided that the GOF was behind schedule. MOD official Colonel Opplert said that he was part of the MOD team working on the new arrangements and he too commented that it was difficult to get C.A.R. officials to understand that France-C.A.R. security arrangement would soon be fundamentally different.

#### An Opportunity

17. (C) The French responded positively to Ambassador Cook's idea, still in gestation, for the U.S. and perhaps others to offer, indirectly, training to the FACA under the guise of

training MICOPAX (formerly FOMUC) units deployed in C.A.R. Ambassador Cook explained that certain MICOPAX units received U.S. training in their home countries before deployment to C.A.R. He thought that it could be possible to implement a second training session for these units once they arrived in C.A.R., with FACA forces also participating. The FACA units could then receive training in such areas as human rights, military-civilian relations, and the like, along with more traditional technical military training. This would allow the FACA to be exposed to modern training methods and principles, without the U.S. and others offering direct training to the FACA. The French took note of this and encouraged Ambassador Cook to continue discussing the idea if it eventually received USG endorsement.

#### Even the Chinese Are Hesitant to Do Business

18. (C) Ambassador Cook and the French discussed at some length the very poor business and investment climate in C.A.R., much of it the result of bad C.A.R. handling of economic and business prospects. The country was rich in resources but inept in managing and using them. Ambassador Cook described the greed-driven way the C.A.R. handled the Areva and Axmin mining contracts, demanding more and more "adjustments" to contracts that appeared to be concluded, all for the private benefit of Bozize or his associates, especially his nephew, Minister Sylvain Ndoutingai. Fages commented that the lack of respect for contracts was a serious detriment to doing business in C.A.R. and agreed with Ambassador Cook that such practices were very strong disincentives for foreign investors to seek opportunities in C.A.R. Ambassador Cook confided that even the Chinese were reluctant to do business in C.A.R., with the Chinese ambassador telling him that Beijing refused to sign-off on certain proposed projects. Fages added that Bozize seemed to believe that because C.A.R. had reached agreement with French firm Areva, this ensured that France would come to his aid if necessary, similar to the way he believed that the presence of French troops in C.A.R. guaranteed that France would "save" him. Fages said that Bozize was off the mark in thinking that these two factors alone -- French troops in

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C.A.R. and the Areva deal -- somehow would afford him special French "protection."

#### Saifée Durbar

19. (C) The French agreed that Bozize associate Saifée Durbar, who seemed to have a hand in any number of nefarious dealings, was an especially pernicious influence. Marechaux and Fages noted that Durbar had been convicted of fraud in a French court and was therefore subject to arrest if he came to France. Fages took a keen interest in discussing with Ambassador Cook ways of apprehending Durbar or at least in limiting his freedom of action. She noted that he seemed to hold a UK passport and was sometimes named to official C.A.R. UNGA delegations and the like, which allowed him to travel relatively freely when part of such delegations. She said that the fact of his conviction in France should perhaps be forwarded to Interpol, with any subsequent Interpol warrant requiring EU member states' cooperation.

#### Comment

10. (C) Ambassador Cook's meetings with the French took place in an open and friendly atmosphere, and it soon became apparent that U.S. and French views of the C.A.R., along with areas of concern and opportunity, were largely identical. The French welcomed the chance to compare notes and Ambassador Cook's visit appears to have set the stage for broader U.S.-France cooperation in matters relating to C.A.R.

11. (U) Ambassador Cook was not able to clear this message before leaving Paris.

STAPLETON